

New Urbanism's Subversive Marketing

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Figure 1. Target Market Groups

Zimmerman/Volk Associates conduct market research for New Urbanist projects. This is their list of the different target market groups for the different kinds of developments along the urban-rural transect.

Source: Zimmerman/Volk Associates Inc., *Journal of Urban Design*, volume 7, number 3, October 2002

There are certain subjects that architectural discourse tends to avoid. These include: the suburbs, the middle-class, marketing, and New Urbanism. Perhaps their associations with commerce, mass production, and business are what make them so distasteful to those who prefer to focus on architecture as an art-practice. Architecture has always operated as both an art with an elite discourse, and as a service and trade with a more direct impact on public and private life. Architects have had to juggle their aspirations for their work's contributions to perceptions of the public good, with the necessities of meeting market demands. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's populist trading between high-culture and low or pop-culture, is but one means of foregrounding, if not resolving, this inherent tension. Nonetheless, despite such examples, there is still tremendous resistance to cross-contaminating the worlds of contemporary theory (or high-culture) and contemporary development, the everyday landscape of the suburbs, sprawl, the market and the middle class. As someone who teaches contemporary architectural theory but lives with contemporary suburban development, I'm convinced both desperately need each other. I'm not sure if that makes me a populist or simply an architectural educator who wants to see her students more effectively realize their ideas, a citizen who wants to see more alternatives to the destructive aspects of sprawl, and an architect who's appalled that our discourse focuses on that minute percentage of construction that we're actually proud of and ignores the vast – and atrocious - majority of what we're building. So, as an urbanist, I'm on a mission to bring together designers, critical theory and public policy with the suburbs, sprawl, and real estate development.

Sprawl – a populist landscape?

The 2000 census confirmed that fifty percent of the U.S. population now lives in the suburbs. Frankly, one might have assumed it was even higher given that the suburbs have accounted for over seventy-five percent of construction over the past thirty years, and almost ninety-percent today¹. As home to the majority of the nation's baby boomers, the target market for all consumer goods – including housing - the suburbs have seen considerably more construction activity than rural areas or even the revived and gentrifying downtowns.² However, while new downtown office towers and high-rise condos are highly visible in situ and in the media, the low-density spread of suburban development, most of it residential, has grown at a far faster, if stealthy, pace.³

Figure 2. Land Uses Converted to Developed Land, 1982-1997

Between 1960 and 2000, urbanized population grew by about 80 percent and urbanized land area grew by 130 percent resulting in urbanized land density dropping from 3,100 persons per square mile to 2,400. Between 1985 and 2001, America added 19 million housing units but 8 million or 40 percent of them were on lots of more than one acre (U.S. Census, 1985, and 2001). And while population grew about 20 percent during this period, vehicle miles traveled grew more than 50 percent. (Arthur C. Nelson, "Towards a New Metropolis: The Opportunity to Rebuild America", A Discussion Paper prepared for The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, December, 2004)

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service

¹ For more elaboration, see Ellen Dunham-Jones, "Seventy-Five Percent," *Harvard Design Magazine*, Fall 2000.

² Of the \$518.6 billion dollars of construction activity in the U.S. in 2003, \$278.1 billion, or 54% was detached single-family homes, most of it suburban and very little of it designed by architects, (source: McGraw Hill Dodge Construction.) However, there are signs of shifts back into urban areas and denser living patterns. The National Association of Realtors reported that in 2003, more condominiums sold than in any other year, sales volume is growing faster than single-family homes, and for the first time, the price midpoint for condos topped that of detached single-family homes. Reported by Thomas A. Fogarty, "Condo Sales Outrun a Fast Market", *USA Today*, February 17, 2004.

³ There are various ways of defining, let alone measuring, the extent of sprawl. The 1997 National Resources Inventory produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture claims that between 1982 and 1997 the United States (minus Alaska) lost 24.8 million acres to development, the loss of rural land grew 34% and per capita land consumption increased 16%, (accounting for 48% of the loss of rural land, with the other 52% attributable to population growth.) The Massachusetts Audubon Society released a report in 2003, "Losing Ground: At What Cost?" that claims the state lost 40 acres per day to new development between 1985 and 1999. Nearly nine of every 10 acres lost went to residential development, with 65% used for low-density, large-lot construction. Jim Miara, quoting a study done by the *New York Times*, in "Visiting Sprawl," *Urban Land*, July 2001, p.76, claims that 17,000 square miles of land that were rural in 1990, reached suburban or urban densities in 2000, (an amount more than twice the size of New Jersey.) This rate of conversion is a slight decline from the 1980's.

Figure 3. Residential Airport outside Chicago

There are approximately 400 residential airports in the U.S., an extreme response to the long commutes mandated by residential developments that are now often 40-60 miles out from the urban core. This example, the Napier Aero Club on the outskirts of Chicago has a modified Radburn plan with the runway down the center, and streets wide enough to accommodate planes taxiing from driveways to the runway.

Source: Robert Cameron, *Above Chicago* (Cameron & Company, San Francisco, 1992).

The majority of commercial and retail space is also increasingly in the suburbs, not in the cities. Twenty-six percent of office stock was in the suburbs in 1979. By 1999, the suburbs accounted for 42% of office space - most of it in “edgeless” locations, New York and Chicago were the only metropolitan areas with the majority of office space located in their primary downtowns, while the majority of office space in Philadelphia, Atlanta, Washington DC, Miami and Detroit was in their suburbs.⁴ The so-called “New Economy” is sometimes referred to as “the exit-ramp economy” since so much of it, like Silicon Valley, is based in suburban office parks. Similarly, the amount of retail square feet per person continues to climb in the U.S., most of it in malls, strip malls, and big box power centers.⁵ In contrast to urban retail, these building types tend to be auto-dependent, short-lived and require vast footprints.⁶

Figure 4. Las Colinas, Texas 1976 and 1986

These images illustrate a typical growth pattern: a highway/arterial intersection attracts fast food restaurants, then a regional or strip mall, office buildings, then apartment complexes. There is a mix of uses, but the regulations require each to be on its own isolated pad, surrounded by its own parking, with relatively large distances between curb cuts. This particular case, the Las Colinas Urban Center, was designed with this pattern.

Source: Landiscor Aerial Photo, courtesy Goldman Sachs & Co.

How is this ubiquitous landscape produced? It is an example of our highly-specialized disciplines at work – each operating according to its own logic, more or less independently. This kind of development is in fact exactly what our regulations and our financing practices encourage. It usually begins with the transportation engineers laying

⁴ Robert Lang, “Office Sprawl: The Evolving Geography of Business”, October 2000, The Brookings Institution.

⁵ The U.S. currently has nine times more retail space per capita than it did in 1960. F. Kaid Benfield, Jutka Terris, Nancy Vorsanger, *Solving Sprawl: Models of Smart Growth in Communities Across America*, (Washington DC: Island Press, 2001,) p.99. Between 1992 and 1994, 55 percent of all new retail space in America came in the form of big-box superstores; in 1994, 80 percent of all new stores fell into this category. *ibid.*, p.59.

⁶ Malls and power centers typically require 50-80 acres and are built for a 5-15 year lifespan.

out what they consider to be a rural road. (To this day, the infamous “Green Book” that dictates design standards for all U.S. Departments of Transportation, bases level of service on a sliding scale between access (for urban conditions) and mobility (for rural conditions,) with little consideration of suburban conditions or pedestrians.) The assumption is that rural roads between cities should be designed to maximize traffic flow, so speeds are high, pedestrians are discouraged, and intersection intervals and curb cuts are limited. Walkability is not a factor to be considered in what is defined as a rural road. However, the new road’s access to cheap land builds development pressures and the prospect of tax revenues. These in turn prompt local governments to grant commercial rezoning requests along the entire length of the new road. Then, the easiest thing for the developers to do is propose a stand-alone building that conforms to one of the 19 standardized real estate products regularly financed by the Wall Street Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS) – the principal source of real estate financing today.⁷ The REITS do not care much about long-term value, let alone a building’s contribution to local placemaking. They care more about predictable performance in the short term (so they can be traded on Wall Street just like pork bellies or any other commodity.) Consequently, the more standardized the strip mall or self-storage facility or other single-use building, and the more well-known the lease holder (chain retailers are preferred over unpredictable Mom & Pop local stores), the easier it is to finance. The same logics apply to construction loans on residential development. The banks base their appraisals on comparables and extrapolations of existing trends. They will only loan money at good rates on building types that have already sold well. As a consequence sprawl continues to be monotonously reproduced as so many individual subdivisions plugged onto the supposedly rural arterial road. Eventually you end up with a traffic-clogged commercial strip. Since every trip now has to funnel through it, the road no longer functions well for the through traffic it was designed for or for the numerous destinations that now line its sides.

The litany of problems associated with this kind of growth are familiar: traffic, social segregation, lack of public space, jobs/housing imbalances, disinvestment in cities and

⁷ Christopher B. Leinberger & Robert Davis, “Financing New Urbanism”, *Thresholds* 18 (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999) REITS limit their investment recommendations to 19 standard real estate products, 17 of which are explicitly stand-alone, sprawl contributors. Along with the secondary mortgage markets preference for uniform real estate products, this is one of the major factors figuring in the reproduction of sprawl.

first-ring suburbs, and unsustainable environmental impacts to wildlife habitats and air and water quality. A recent study by American Forests states that U.S. cities have lost 20% of their trees in the last ten years primarily to urban sprawl and highway construction.⁸ The low-density development pattern creates automobile dependence and has resulted in such dramatic increases in vehicle use that tailpipe emissions from automobiles have replaced smokestack emissions from factories as the principal source of leading toxic air pollutants in the U.S.⁹ Similarly, runoff pollution from developed land is now the nation's leading threat to water quality.¹⁰ Almost one hundred American cities now suffer with chronic lack of compliance with Clean Air and Clean Water standards. And, it is not only environmental health that is affected. Recent studies suggest a correlation between urban sprawl and human sprawl. Obesity is now an epidemic in the US and while much of it is caused by our eating habits, the physical form of our habitat is also an important factor.¹¹ People living in suburban environments tend to lead extremely sedentary lives: they work in offices or learn in classrooms - sitting, they drive everywhere - sitting, they watch many hours of television – sitting – and snacking. Despite the suburbs' reputation as a family-friendly healthy environment, people in cities tend to walk more and be healthier.

Despite all of the problems with sprawl, it remains the predominant model and is immensely popular. Is it therefore appropriate to conclude that this landscape is what “the people” want? Is this a populist landscape? I'll return to this question.

The Market and The Public Realm

In a very good analysis of discourse on “the everyday” and its recent popularity in architectural theory, Dell Upton proposes that everyday architecture – with a little a – is the Other of high-design Architecture - with a capital A.¹² To take this observation further, I would argue that sprawl, the bulk of contemporary building, is repressed in high-Architecture discourse. Why? Perhaps, because it reminds us of our failures. Our

⁸ Reuters, September 18, 2003, published in several newspapers, and reported on CNN.

⁹ Total vehicle use more than tripled between 1960 and 1995. Benfield, *Solving Sprawl*, p.3

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ There are several recent studies on this topic. See Howard Frumkin, Lawrence Frank, and Richard Jackson, *Urban Sprawl and Public Health*, (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004)

¹² Dell Upton, “Architecture in Everyday Life,” *New Literary History*, 2002, 33; 709.

failure to produce a popular modern urbanism other than sprawl¹³ and our failure to convince “the people” that social progress is dependent, in part, on building “progressive” environments. While most architects remain motivated by a veiled zeitgeist imperative that modern design is necessary to usher in progressive lifestyles and a progressive society, most consumers simply view modern versus traditional as a decorating choice.¹⁴

Perhaps most of all, the suburbs remind architects of our failure to convince the majority of the public of the value of Architecture, capital A, for their everyday lives and their personal investments. High-design Architecture is valued for the cultural message it sends about a place and is welcomed generally for culturally significant building types, but the evidence surrounds us that Architecture with a capital A, with intellectual thought about advancing societal agendas is not deemed a worthwhile investment for the majority of homes, office parks, retail strips, etc.. Nor have architects abilities to accommodate individual desires while contributing to collective, communal interests been called upon in the design of sprawl. Does this mean that “the people” don’t want a public realm? Don’t care about design? Don’t care about the environment? Don’t care about community?

Homebuilding is a big business in the U.S. and unlike in Europe, is almost entirely market-rate, with public subsidy coming in the form of after-sale tax deductions of mortgage interest. In 2003, 1.8 million new homes were constructed, the highest number in 25 years.¹⁵ Most of the contractors on those homes belong to the National Association of Home Builders, an organization that attracts 75,000 members to its annual convention. They come because, even more than the developers or the designers, they want to know, what do “the people” want? Ultimately, it’s the builders who have to sell the houses and they cannot afford to be left holding unpopular, designs. They rarely invite architects to show them what the architects think would be good design

¹³ Ironically, sprawl’s land-use pattern of functionalist single-use zoning connected by highways is a direct legacy of CIAM’s Corbusian principles – perhaps the most repressed of modern architecture’s legacies, and that with the highest impact.

¹⁴ For further elaboration of this point, see Ellen Dunham-Jones, “Stars, Swatches, and Sweets: The Role of Design in the Post-Industrial Economy”, in *Thresholds*, vol. 15, Fall 1997, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

¹⁵ Maricé Chael, “The NAHB Builders Show: Reflections from Las Vegas,” *The Town Paper*, vol 6, no. 1, spring 2004, p.10.

improvements. Instead, they invite the market researchers. What kind of designs and features sold the best last year and in what markets? What do surveys of consumer preferences indicate will be next year's hot products? The results can have a profound influence, such that up to 30% of a year's new housing will be slight variations of a single winning floorplan presented at the previous year's homebuilder convention.

The Homebuilders' surveys have consistently revealed a strong preference for "the American Dream," a single family detached house in a traditional style on a relatively large lot. While American consumers have embraced contemporary designs for products like Nikes and iMacs, their architectural tastes remain very conservative, especially those of middle-class homebuyers. They tend to look for traditional signifiers of status and stability, perhaps to compensate for the middle class's declines in both in recent decades¹⁶, but certainly to aid in the re-sale value. The average American household moves every five to six years. While this might seem to support a willingness to experiment with modern, evolving styles, it has the opposite affect. Today's middle class by and large, associates modern architecture either with office buildings, the poor, or the asbestos-filled tract homes their parents bought and lost money on. Instead, there is a marked preference for easy-to-sell conventional styles on the biggest house and the biggest lot one can afford.

Despite continued demand for "the American Dream", there is also growing recognition that each new house contributes to traffic and land consumption, and consequently, movements resisting growth have increased in popularity. Voters have significantly supported public investment in public transit and the protection of open space.¹⁷ Several pre-September 11 polls found that Americans ranked traffic and urban sprawl as their

¹⁶ Since the 1960s, the middle class in the U.S. has lost the job security associated with their formerly unionized jobs, and, as the rich have gotten richer and the poor have gotten poorer, according to an August 26, 2004 U.S. Census Bureau report, households with income between \$25,000 and \$75,000, adjusted for inflation in 2003 dollars, went from 51.9% of the population in 1980 to 44.9% in 2003, (Timothy Egan, "Economic Squeeze Plaguing Middle-Class Families", *New York Times*, August 28, 2004, p.A11) Since 2001, 4.3 million U.S. citizens have fallen below the poverty line and median family income has dropped, ("Economic Reality Bites", editorial, *New York Times*, August 28, 2004, p.A26)

¹⁷ Despite the markedly divided presidential vote in the November, 2004 election, support for mass transit and parks and preserves was both strong and bi-partisan. Of the 50 transit ballot initiatives voted on across the United States, 39 were approved while 120 of the 161 land conservation measures passed.

number one local concern, tied with crime and ahead of jobs and education.¹⁸ Yet, at the same time, the market for low-density development continues to be strong. In essence, each individual wants everyone else to use transit and live in a condo and get off the road and out of their view of countryside! Collectively, “the people” have clearly said that they do not want sprawl. However, their individual purchases continue to support it.

Figure 5. Suburban Cafe

The quality of what passes for public or civic space in sprawl is pathetically low and remarkably placeless. The joke is that you can only tell that you’ve entered a new town when the chain stores start repeating.

Source: Schaumburg, Illinois, 1995, Bob Thall

In fact, the entire industries of market researchers, contractors, and realtors have helped produce this landscape geared solely to the satisfaction of private desires. As a consequence we have been building pathetic public spaces that we collectively compensate for with fantastic, if also inherently compromised, private spaces. Instead of communal theaters and Olympic-size natatoriums, we get home entertainment systems and small backyard pools. Instead of the traditional “good” populist concerns with collective action for some notion of a public or common good, sprawl shows us the degree to which “what the people want” is no longer considered in collective, populist, or public terms. It is solely measured in terms of individual desires. In this sense, the market now substitutes for the public, and what “the people” want individually has been severed from what “the people” want collectively. Similarly, marketing has reduced any critical notion of counterpublics and multiple publics simply to “niche markets.”

The marketing of this lifestyle presumes that “what people want” are; “community” out their front door and “nature” out their back door. Joel Garreau facetiously claimed that one of the rules of contemporary development is to name your project after whatever species you have forever eradicated from the site: Eagle Ridge, Fox Run, Pin Oak Preserve.¹⁹ The references are almost exclusively to nature, or to quaint sounding British villages, but never to anything urban. Ever since Thomas Jefferson’s anti-urban lauding of the gentleman farmer, Americans have historically been suspicious of cities. Despite

¹⁸ Feb. 15, 2000 Press Release from the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, Washington D.C.. See also a September, 2000 poll by Belden, Russonello & Stewart, commissioned by Smart Growth America, found that 78% of the 1007 adults in a geographically balanced poll support policies to curb sprawl. Available at www.smartgrowthamerica.com.

¹⁹ Joel Garreau, *Edge City, Life on the New Frontier*, (New York: Doubleday, 1991)

our myths of melting pots, most individual homebuyers still think of “diversity”, “density”, “urban” and even “public” as dirty words or inferior categories. As a consequence, most developers, bankers, contractors, and even public planning boards strongly resist the factors that might mitigate sprawl such as mixed-use, mixed-income, transit, and compactness.

This situation puts architects and urban designers in a dilemma. Should they design for “the market”(individual interests) or for “the public” (collective interests)? Designers have long understood their obligations to both, to serve the individual client’s needs while also contributing to generally accepted understandings of the public interest. But, rarely have the two been so diametrically opposed. The benefits of sprawl accrue to individuals, while the costs are borne collectively by society. Given the strength of private property rights in the U.S., and the minimal role of public development, (except roadbuilding), there have been very few successful challenges to sprawl.

And yet, in fact there is a significant market for alternatives to sprawl. Several studies show that between 30-40% of homebuyers are frustrated with the lack of choices available to them.²⁰ Although several American cities experienced revivals in the nineties, the residue of decades of disinvestment in cities have made most homebuyers reluctant to consider urban living. Limited to locating in the suburbs, their only choices have been varied flavors of single-use subdivisions – even though market studies show a sizable market willing to pay a 5-25% supplement for living in mixed-use, compact, walkable, neighborhoods.²¹

²⁰ The National Association of Realtors’ 2001 “Community and Housing Preference Survey” found that one third of home-buyer respondents have a strong preference for “new urbanism” housing options, and up to half may be attracted to these options once they see them. Similarly, the SMARTRAQ preferences survey of 1466 Atlanta metro area residents found that approximately one in three current inhabitants of conventional suburbs would prefer to be living in a more walkable neighborhood, 53% prefer connected streets and 3-mile drives over cul-de-sacs and 15-18 mile drives, 56% would sacrifice having a larger home if it means always having to drive, although 60% would still prefer a detached single family house over living in the town center. Frank, L., Levine, J., Chapman, J. 2004. *Transportation and Land-Use Preferences and Atlanta Residents’ Neighborhood Choices -- Implementing Transit Oriented Development in the Atlanta Region*. Georgia Regional Transportation Authority and Georgia Department of Transportation, Project CM-000-00(339)m O.I. # 0000339.

²¹ Eppli, Mark J., and Charles C. Tu. *Valuing the New Urbanism : the Impact of the New Urbanism on Prices of Single-Family Homes*. Washington, D.C.,: ULI – The Urban Land Institute, 1999.

New Urbanism: Alternative to Sprawl

Market demand combined with public interest in alternatives to sprawl is fueling interest in a new urbanism that reveals the market for urbanism within the suburbs. A new urbanism that recognizes that the suburbs are where the bulk of the market is, but that valorizes cities and urban living. A new urbanism of transit-oriented development instead of park 'n rides, of neighborhoods instead of subdivisions, and of Main Streets instead of malls. A new urbanism of mixed-uses, mixed-building types, mixed-lot sizes, mixed-incomes, multiple modes of transportation and multiple interconnected street types. A new urbanism that celebrates the public realm and trades large lots each with its own patio, pool, and swing set for nearby sidewalk cafes and neighborhood parks and playgrounds. A new urbanism that reconciles both private and public interests, that is both marketable and mitigates sprawl. A new urbanism that rejects ad hoc, incremental, low-density development in favor of regional planning that targets areas both for conservation and for higher density growth – including reinvestment in infill sites and central cities.

Figure 6. Conventional Suburban Development versus Traditional Neighborhood Design

The average vehicle trips generated by a single family in a detached home is 10.1 per weekday.²² For people living in conventional suburban development, shown in the top half of this image, each trip has to travel on the high-speed arterial, with the effect of requiring that every one of those trips be made by car - using up resources, polluting the air, and isolating those who cannot drive. (The Surface Transportation Policy Project's recent report, "Aging Americans: Stranded Without Options" reports that more than half of the non-drivers aged 65 and over stay home because their transportation choices are limited.) Children in single-family houses are physically deterred from playing with their peers in apartment buildings and Mothers in minivans become chauffeurs clocking 30% more vehicle miles than men. In the traditional neighborhood design (TND), in the lower half of the drawing, uses are more interconnected, traffic is distributed through an interconnected network of slower, narrower, walkable streets, increasing safe mobility for non-drivers, and increasing the likelihood that at least some of those 10 trips will be made on foot or bicycle. By increasing walking, the TND also increases the possibility of neighborly interaction, and with a wider range of people. The TND's combination of community-building and environmental benefits, distinguish it as an alternative to sprawl and a model for New Urbanism.

Source: Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company

Figure 7. Alternative Development Scenarios

²² Institute of Transportation Engineers, *Trip Generation* (Washington, DC: Institute of Transportation Engineers, 1987).

This sequence shows a typical beltway interchange on the left, the kind of sprawl development that conventional regulations promote in the middle, and a New Urbanist alternative had different regulations been in place on the right. The New Urbanist development takes the same mix of uses in the middle image, but reconfigures them compactly as a town, extending, preserving and reinforcing the existing village and making use of its position on a rail line to concentrate the new buildings into a Transit-Oriented-Development (TOD.) The synergies between the different uses add value to each other and tend to hold that value longer, making them both more economically and ecologically sustainable, while preserving far more open space.

Source: Regional Planning Association, New York, 1990

Unfortunately, according to the current system, such a new urbanism is largely illegal and almost impossible to finance. The need for fundamental reforms to the current system, to at least allow for alternatives, prompted the formation of the Congress for the New Urbanism, (CNU.) It got started in 1989, when six architects got together who had been working at the scale of urban design.²³ The meeting included Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk of Miami (the designers of Seaside, Florida with its focus on community building around public spaces and streets designed like outdoor rooms,) and Peter Calthorpe of San Francisco, with his strong interest in the environmental benefits of transit-oriented development. They recognized that they shared a common enemy: the regulations that reproduce suburban sprawl. In 1991 they invited 75 of their like-minded friends in related disciplines to meet, critique each other's work, and discuss their shared frustrations with contemporary development patterns. They decided to call themselves the Congress for the New Urbanism – a deliberate reference to the Congress d'Architecture International Moderne, (CIAM), in that they too planned to hold annual congresses and write a charter. However, their charter is aimed at replacing CIAM's modern urbanism with a new urbanism (inspired by pre-CIAM planning) of healthy regions balancing growth and conservation; compact, mixed use, mixed-income, neighborhoods of walkable street networks with transit; and attractive, focal public spaces, including the streets themselves, framed by buildings that are responsive to place and climate.²⁴

²³ Dan Solomon, Elizabeth Moule and Stefanos Polyzoides and were the other CNU founders at the meeting, invited by Judy Corbett, head of the California Local Governments Commission.

²⁴ I missed the first two congresses, but have been to the past ten. From 1996-2000 I was co-chair of the CNU Educators Task Force and attended numerous board meetings. What I may lack in objectivity, I hope I make up for in direct experience and knowledge of what the aims and discussions have been about.

Figure 8. The Urban-Rural Transect

Andres Duany's diagram of seven zones along an urban-rural transect differentiates environments at the scale of the region or at the scale of a neighborhood. It serves as a New Urbanist placemaking and community-building tool for resisting the monoculture developments of crude land-use designations by linking finely graded zoning, street types, building types, and design guidelines to each other. The point is not necessarily to produce seamless gradations between transect zones, as the diagram implies, so much as to establish coherent differences between centers and edges such that a range of households and needs are both accommodated and interconnected.

Source: Andres Duany, Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company

CNU has been developing such a new urbanism along three simultaneous trajectories. On the one hand, the members of the organization and staff have collectively been working on changing the systems that reproduce sprawl to allow for development that is more in keeping with public goals. They have written a Charter with 27 principles, model codes, devised new transect-based standards for finer-grained linkage of land-use, transportation, building types, and niche markets; engaged in educating diverse professionals involved in the built environment, and formed partnerships to influence policy with key federal agencies, (HUD and EPA) and strategic organizations (AIA, AIAS, APA, ULI, Fannie Mae, USGBC, ITE.)²⁵ On the other hand, the members of the organization have been working as individual professionals designing and building over 600 new urbanist developments. In the twelve years of CNU's existence, the projects have evolved from an initial focus on Greenfield TODs and TNDs, to greater concern with urban infill, brownfield and grayfield projects, (especially the more than 100 Hope VI public housing projects that have been built according to New Urbanist guidelines) and increased attention to both regional design and environmental considerations. The obstacles to implementation remain significant and most projects have suffered compromises along the way, often being forced to lower densities or limit the number of affordable housing units. However, many of the projects have been extremely successful economically, improving the movement's reputation and opportunities. The third trajectory, the sharing of strategies and development of a transdisciplinary discourse, is also responsible for much of the evolution of new urbanism. CNU is a forum not a formula. In addition to the annual congresses, CNU now has a newsletter, awards program, regional chapters and council meetings where projects continue to be

²⁵ For more information, visit www.cnu.org.

presented and critiqued, successful and failed strategies are shared, design techniques honed, and ambitions ever elevated.

Figure 9. Mixed-Income, Mixed Building Types at Kentlands, Maryland

The original sale prices of new homes on a single block in Kentlands, (a DPZ Greenfield TND outside Washington, DC) demonstrate how mixed-lot sizes and building types that respond to their urban location can foster a much greater mix of incomes than typical same-lot size development. The large single-family homes on the north and west sides of this block sit on an “A” street facing a park and commanded prices approaching a half million dollars. The homes on the “B” street at the bottom of the slide averaged just under \$300,000 on slightly smaller lots. The townhouses on the side street sold for \$200-250,000 and the apartments above the accessory garages in the middle of the block rented for \$750/month. It is worth noting that all of the prices are approximately 12% more than neighboring subdivisions for comparable square footage and lot size, demonstrating that well-designed, community-oriented and walkable mixed income actually increases property values.

Source: Zimmerman/Volk Associates Inc.

Figure 10. Mixed-Income Public Housing in Cincinnati, Ohio

In its Hope VI campaign to deconcentrate poverty, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development employed New Urbanist guidelines to redevelop 217 of the most blighted public housing projects, most of them ‘50’s and ‘60’s towers or barracks on urban superblocks. The redeveloped projects, like this one designed by Torti-Gallas CHK, combine undifferentiated market rate and publicly subsidized units and integrate them back into the existing neighborhood through reconnected street grids and compatible traditional architecture.

Source: Torti-Gallas CHK Architects, photographer: Steve Hall © Hedrich Blessing

The New Urbanists’ bold claims set them up for criticism, which has been ample and from both sides of the political spectrum. They have been criticized as naïve for enthusiastically presenting New Urbanism as the free market solution to all of the world’s problems, or worse, as corrupted by the market, offering little more than aestheticized sprawl. Conservatives and libertarians bark at new urbanism as socialist governmental interference with private property, while left wing academics, decry new urbanism’s nostalgia for more unified, traditional communities as reinstalling the patterns of patriarchy, squelching the expression of dissent that is critical to democracy, and appealing to the worst kind of xenophobic populism.

The neo-traditional styling associated with both the architecture and the urbanism is particularly controversial, provoking deep feelings of connection amongst admirers and

charges of disneyfication and social regression from detractors. Ironically, the focus on the surface appearance of New Urbanism reveals how distant both traditional and modernist architects have come from seeing architecture in relation to solving larger societal and placemaking issues. The leading New Urbanists use style very strategically, both to connect to popular, climate-appropriate, regional building traditions and to mask the more radical (and unpopular) aspects of their projects: mixed uses, mixed incomes, compact lots and transit. In what could be seen as subversive marketing, New Urbanist projects tend to use pleasing, traditional, familiar, unthreatening imagery, precisely to build market acceptance of these progressive, public goals.²⁶ Is this nostalgia or is it just a pragmatic way of overcoming suburban resistance to a more sustainable form of development? In the end, some of the high-design community's knee-jerk disdain for New Urbanism may be because it has picked up the modernist torch of social reform abandoned by today's neo-avant-garde. In addition to employing subversive marketing techniques, are the New Urbanists subversive modernists?

Figure 11. Prospect, Colorado

Approximately 60% of the New Urbanist communities in the U.S. are "Greenfield" projects, meaning they are built on undeveloped, often rural, land. Regulatory obstacles and NIMBY ("not in my back yard") resistance from neighbors make these projects much easier to develop than infill sites and they are where the movement got its start. Masterplanned by DPZ, this greenfield TND outside Denver has more modernist architecture than most and ironic street names like "Incorrigible Circle".

Source: *Dwell* magazine, April 2002

New Urbanists and Rem Koolhaas: Subversive Marketing or Marketing Subversiveness?

Is it too much of a stretch to present the New Urbanists as subversive radicals? Are their interests in the suburbs, marketing, and development practices just too middle class, too bourgeois to drive real change? Rem Koolhaas studies suburbs, marketing, and development practices too and enjoys an avant-garde reputation. His writings on bigness and generic cities and his work on the *Harvard Guide to Shopping* are similarly concerned with the systems that reproduce contemporary development. He too is interested in architecture not just as an art-practice, but as the intersection between art, business, money and culture. His work engages this intersection at the elite levels of

²⁶ In the terms of this conference, these clearly fall into the more politically suspect category of "strategies of anticipation". New Urbanism also makes extensive use "strategies of mobilization", principally in the use of 7-10 day charrettes involving stakeholders in the design of the project.

Prada and the Guggenheim, while the New Urbanists operate at the more everyday level of production builders and traditional ideas of civic art. But, both share an interest in the big picture behind the surface and beyond the more narrow concerns that have dominated architectural discourse. Both are bringing larger development patterns and processes into architectural discussion. Koolhaas even more than the New Urbanists, recognizes the degree to which the market now substitutes for the public. However, it is difficult to draw connections between his research and his design work. Disdainful of moralizing positions, he deliberately refrains from making judgments about the effects of the market, preferring only to express a certain admiration for how its power and effectiveness has eclipsed that of architecture and planning. There is much the New Urbanists could learn from Koolhaas. His designs are formally more interesting than the New Urbanists and juxtapose innovative forms, with thrilling spatial manipulations, bold and intelligent graphics, and unconventionally-used materials around circulation systems that privilege chance encounters and open-ended possibilities.²⁷ Yet, beyond a preference for an urbanism of dynamic juxtapositions, he deliberately avoids establishing a prescribed public agenda for his work.²⁸

Figure 12. Envision Utah, Quality Growth Strategy – composite map

This regional design for accommodating the tripling of Salt Lake City's population over the next 50 years demonstrates the New Urbanists' commitment to public participation and Smart Growth principles. The plan, by Fregonese Calthorpe Associates, developed out of an extensive process of over 600 community workshops, significant media coverage and 18,000 participants voting online for their preferred plan. The process educated the public to recognize the conflicts between the market's desires and the growth pressures from increased population, and the need for trade-offs. The plan demonstrated that low-density sprawl would add over 400 square miles of urbanized land over the next fifty years, while compact development would add 85 square miles. It succeeded in developing a regional consciousness and helped to build public consensus for acceptance of higher density, more transit, and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in growth areas, and stricter conservation rules to protect the mountain slopes from development.

Source: Fregonese Calthorpe Associates

²⁷ The multi-directional ramp at Koolhaas' Rotterdam Kunsthalle or the intersecting movement systems in his masterplan for Euralille are examples of what, in the context of this conference, might be called "strategies of mobilization".

²⁸ This could be understood as an effort to respect the multiplicity of publics using his spaces, but also likely stems from his strong distrust of moralizing positions. See "Lite Urbanism", Rem Koolhaas and OMA, *S,M,X, XL*, (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995)

In comparison, if New Urbanism is nostalgic, it is not for the gingerbread architecture, but for an engaged public realm, for charrettes with public involvement, for public debates on laws, and at professional congresses. In the New Urbanist work, retail and shopping are vital to the mix, but are still used to frame “civic” space, not to completely substitute for it.

Highly critical of sprawl and the systems that reproduce it, and eager to change those systems from within, the New Urbanists’ strategies negotiate between the market and the public, between architecture (little a) and Architecture (capital A), and between serving “the people” and advancing “the discipline” of urban design. They operate mostly in the middle landscape of suburbia. As a middle course, New Urbanism is inherently not avant-garde, (at the leading edge), although in my opinion, its quiet engagement in fundamentally altering the laws, regulations and financing practices that reproduce sprawl, is both more radical and producing far more profound changes than the sexy restylings of most of our architectural elite. Interestingly, high-theory and high-design may also be moving towards middle grounds. The shift towards the post-critical, or what W. J. T. Mitchell, editor of *Critical Inquiry* calls “Medium Theory”²⁹ as well as Koolhaas’s middle course between the market and art-practice, offer hope that more designers will begin to engage the suburbs, the market, the middle class and New Urbanism.

Figure 13. Del Mar Station, Pasadena, California

To reduce auto-dependency, New Urbanists encourage the sensitive integration of transit and new mixed-use development, as in this TOD designed by Moule & Polyzoides. The station welcomes users to Pasadena with a public plaza, retail, underground parking, and affordable housing whose varied massing both establishes private courtyards for residents and strong urban corners in scale with diverse existing conditions.

Source: Moule & Polyzoides, Architects and Urbanists

Figure 14. Kendall, Miami: Before and After

Municipalities in search of economic development solutions for dead or dying brownfields and grayfields often turn to New Urbanism. “Brownfields” are former industrial sites and “Grayfields” are suburban sites dominated by parking lots. This grayfield TOD designed by Dover, Kohl & Partners and Duany Plater-Zyberk and under construction, inserts parking garages, a street grid and mixed-use liner buildings into the

²⁹ W.J. T. Mitchell, “Medium Theory”, *Critical Inquiry*, Winter 2004, Volume 30, Number 2.

parking lots separating an existing suburban office park and shopping mall. The new development provides a street face to these inward-oriented building types, makes walkable streets, and connects the neighborhood to the existing, but neglected canal, and a new rail station.

Source: Dover, Kohl & Partners Town Planning